

LIFE programme: Council agrees its position on the EU's environmental policy flagship programme

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The LIFE programme protects nature and biodiversity in all European countries

The EU is updating its main funding instrument for nature, biodiversity and climate action projects. The Council today agreed its position (partial general approach) on a regulation to extend the LIFE programme beyond 2020. LIFE is the EU's flagship programme dedicated to funding environmental, nature conservation and climate action projects. The agreement excludes budget-related and horizontal issues which are currently being discussed as part of the negotiations on the EU's next multiannual financial framework for the period 2021 to 2027. It provides the presidency with a mandate to start negotiations with the European Parliament.



The LIFE programme has proved its worth. It has co-financed projects everywhere in Europe which protect biodiversity, restore habitats and save endangered wildlife from extinction. The Iberian lynx, the brown bear, the black stork and many other species have benefited from LIFE funding. We will make sure that the programme continues after 2020.

Elisabeth Köstinger, Austrian federal minister of sustainability and tourism

A major new feature of the proposal is the addition of a dedicated sub-programme for the clean energy transition. Clean energy transition projects will continue to be funded until 2020 via the Horizon 2020 programme. However, the rapid deployment of renewable energy sources and improved energy efficiency can be an essential contribution to the mitigation of climate change with co-benefits for the environment.

LIFE will therefore consist of two areas, each with two sub-programmes:

Environment

- Nature and biodiversity sub-programme
- Circular economy and quality of life sub-programme

Climate action

- Climate change mitigation and adaptation sub-programme
- Clean energy transition sub-programme

Member states attach particular importance to nature and biodiversity protection. This is why the Council specifies that at least 60% of the budget allocated to projects in the area of environment shall be dedicated to projects supporting nature and biodiversity. In addition, the Council sets a more attractive co-financing rate of up to 75 % of eligible costs for those nature and biodiversity projects which help protect priority wildlife species or habitats which deserve particular protection. The standard co-financing rate for LIFE projects is set at 60% of the eligible costs.

The Council specifies the timeframe 2021 to 2027 for the next LIFE programme, and thereby aligns its duration to the multiannual financial framework. The Commission's proposal did not include a timeframe for the LIFE programme regulation.

The Commission proposed a total financial envelope of €5.45 billion for LIFE for the period 2021-2027. This includes €3.5 billion for the area of environment and €1.95 billion for the area of climate action. The final amounts will depend on the agreement reached on the next multiannual financial framework.

The good quality of project applications remains the key criterion for awarding LIFE programme funding. Experience shows however that there is a need to improve the geographical balance of funding obtained via LIFE. The Council therefore specifies that the category of technical assistance projects shall also include capacity-building projects which will support member state authorities in improving the quality of their project applications, and national contact points in providing better services. The Council has introduced a cap to these grants: the maximum overall amount allocated may not exceed €15 million. As all other amounts, also this one will depend on the agreement reached on the next multiannual financial framework.

Background and next steps

The Commission presented the proposal on the LIFE programme on 1 June 2018. Launched in 1992, the LIFE programme is the only EU fund entirely dedicated to environmental and climate objectives. The general objective of the proposed LIFE programme for 2021-2027 is to contribute to the shift towards a clean, circular, energy-efficient, low-carbon and climate-resilient economy, including through the transition to clean energy, to protect and improve the quality of the environment and to halt and reverse biodiversity loss. To date, LIFE has co-financed more than 4500 projects.

The partial general approach reached today enables the Council to start

negotiations with the European Parliament which adopted its position on the regulation on 11 December 2018. Negotiations are expected to start in January under the Romanian presidency.

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